

Day Care Workshop Report

Cynthia Aldinger

At the East Coast Kindergarten Conference in February 1997, Felicitas Vogt and Eugene Schwartz gave talks on the struggle of children today to incarnate in a healthy way, especially in regard to their will. They served as the backdrop for many of the workshops, especially this one on the need for day care in our times.

Fifteen of us came together to strengthen our movement's awakening consciousness for the need to offer day care out of the inspiration of spiritual science. Most of those present were already providing day care either in homes or centers; some are involved in pre-school settings. We spent a good deal of time just listening to each other's stories of what it means to be involved in this work. One could sense a real need for the opportunity to develop collegueship which our Kindergarten teachers have been able to enjoy for years. The day care work seemed to lend itself to a feeling of isolation. The question arose whether the movement really endorsed caring for children under three.

It felt like such a gift to be able to be the one conducting the workshop on behalf of our Kindergarten Association Board and to share that we not only endorse this work but see it as essential to the times in which we live. The announcement that we are considering changing the association's name from Kindergarten Association to Early Childhood Association was warmly received.

The substance of our workshop included imagining these children who are coming to us with their pre-birth intentions, gathering near the earth during the holy nights and waiting, as the year unfolded, until the situation was ripe to arrive through various birth experiences. We imagined these souls passing through the "net" or "world-wide web" of technology as they passed through the Earth's atmosphere and thought about Felicitas Vogt's statement that these children still chose to come even with all the perceived chaos in life today. One could say we owe them a debt of gratitude for coming.

We then spoke of some of the things Eugene Schwartz and Felicitas Vogt discussed in their lectures and looked at a variety of handouts regarding day care and children's lifestyles in our current culture. That was followed by comparing the latest brain research to things Rudolf Steiner had to say almost one hundred years ago:

From *Time* magazine, Feb. 3, -1997 "*How a Brain Develops*"

"Of all the discoveries that have poured out of neuroscience labs in recent years, the finding that the electrical activity of brain cells changes the structure of the brain is perhaps the most breathtaking... A brain is not a computer. Nature does not cobble it together, then turn it on... And the same processes that wire the brain before birth, neuroscientists are finding, also drive the explosion of learning that occurs immediately afterward... But while the brain contains virtually all the nerve cells it will ever have, the pattern of wiring between them has yet to stabilize what the brain has done is lay out circuits that are its best guess about what's required for vision, for language, for whatever. And now it is up to neural activity - no longer spontaneous, but driven by a flood of sensory experiences to take this rough blueprint and progressively refine it."

From "*The Development of the Brain...*", a lecture by Rudolf Steiner in Berlin, June 17, 1909:

"If you watch a very young child for some weeks, perhaps even for months, you will see the child's head surrounded by etheric and astral currents and forces. But these currents and forces gradually become

indistinct and after some time vanish. What is really taking place? ... Immediately after the birth of a human being his brain does not function as it does after a few weeks or months. True, the child perceives the external world, but its brain is not yet an instrument capable of connecting external impressions in a definite way. By means of connecting nerves running from one part of the brain to another, the human being learns by degrees to link together in thought what he perceives in the external world, but these connecting nerve-strands develop only after birth... a child will hear and see a bell, but the impression of the sound and the sight of the bell do not immediately combine to form the thought that the bell is ringing. The child learns this only gradually, because the part of the brain that is the instrument for the perception of sound and the part that is the instrument of visual perception become connected only in the course of life. Not until this happens is it possible for the child to reach the conclusion: What I see there is also sounding. Thus connecting threads develop in the brain, and the forces which organize the connecting threads are seen by the clairvoyant during the first few weeks of the child's life as something that is forming extra sheaths for the brain. But what at first envelops the brain, subsequently passes into and lives within the brain, no longer working outside but within it. What works from outside during the first weeks of the child's life could not work further on the whole development of the growing human being were it not protected by various sheaths."

In the second half of our workshop, we divided into three groups and brainstormed (no pun intended) about the needs of the young child in three age categories infants, toddlers and 3-year olds. We took into consideration the four primary senses touch, life, movement and balance. We developed lists of the things mentioned [which are available from Cynthia]. These are not at all the same as the ones I am being "taught" in my day care course!

We ended our time together by speaking briefly about what we can do to become more involved with the national day care movement. It was suggested that participating first at the local level might be best. A list of addresses of people in each state who are in charge of the Early Childhood Public Engagements Campaign was made available to everyone. They were also told about a public broadcast to be aired on April 28th to kick off a multiyear public awareness campaign. Clearly a lot is happening right now, mostly through the efforts of NAEYC (National Association for the Education of the Young Child).

Everyone was encouraged to join the Waldorf Kindergarten Association if not already members. We realized that there are many other things we need to address regarding day care, not the last of which is the organizational structure we may wish to establish. We would like to be able to have workshops on such topics as training for day care, financial packaging, insurance, grant writing, etc. We also agreed that it would be nice to have Helle Heckmann, who has a very successful day care in Denmark, come over and spend some time with us.

In the meantime, we will be using the Kindergarten Association newsletter as our vehicle for communication, rather than establishing our own newsletter at this time. Consequently, anyone wishing to have the address list of the participants at the workshop or any of the other information we handed out that weekend is welcome to write to me, as I have agreed to be our day care communications coordinator for now.

We closed with a verse by Rudolf Steiner and I hope, with a new sense of partnership to one another.